



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Rhode Island Hunters and Fishermen for the Hungry Program

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Since 2004, DEM and local hunters and fishermen have teamed up to help Rhode Islanders in need. The Hunters & Fishermen for the Hungry Program helps DEM manage wildlife populations and at the same time provides high quality protein to local food pantries. Hunters can donate their surplus game including deer, goose and fish to a number of local food kitchens. The overabundant deer population in Rhode Island provides a good example of how the program works.

In the 1990's, Rhode Island's deer population began to increase rapidly and conflicts between white-tailed deer and humans have become a prominent wildlife management concern – especially in urban and suburban areas. Overabundant deer populations in residential settings are associated with high rates of deer vehicle accidents, increased risk of contracting Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases and damage to plant and landscapes.

Many states and communities have struggled with strategies to safely and effectively reduce deer population. Hunting is the most cost-effective management tool used by state wildlife agencies across the country to manage free ranging deer populations. Rhode Island DEM has increased opportunities to hunt deer by lengthening the deer hunting season, increasing the number each hunter can take and encouraging deer hunting on private lands.

While these programs play a key role in curtailing the overabundant deer population, many hunters think it is wasteful to take more deer than they can eat. The Hunters and Fishermen for the Hungry program provides a market for their surplus catch.

Quick Facts

- Over 1,200 deer related vehicle accidents occur in RI each year
- 6,768 cases of Lyme Disease were reported in RI between 1993 and 2006 (Source: Center for Disease Control)
- The root cause of hunger is poverty. Today in Rhode Island, 11.1 percent of the population has income below the official poverty level, meaning that 114,000 people are living in poverty, including 35,000 children and 12,000 senior adults. (Source: 2006 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).



St. Mary/St. James Food Pantry in Charlestown welcomes donations of surplus fish and meat from hunters.

The partnership between the Breachway Bait and Tackle Shop and St. Mary/St. James Food Pantry, both in Charlestown, provides a good example of how partnerships to encourage donations work. Breachway Bait and Tackle encourages hunters and fishermen to donate surplus catch by offering customers a chance on a raffle each time they donate surplus fish or venison. In December at its annual Christmas party, Breachway raffles off numerous prizes, which are donated by local

business and Breachway vendors. Breachway also teams up with local marinas to sponsor fishing tournaments where all of the catch is donated to the St. Mary/St. James Food Pantry. Local volunteers prepare and label (sample label available for visuals) the surplus fish and meat in accordance with state and federal requirements for processing, packaging and refrigerating/freezing.

The St. Mary/St. James Community Food Pantry, which services approximately 1,300 individuals per month in the Washington County, receives the donated fish and game from Breachway on a weekly basis, if a supply is available. The fish and game are especially welcome by the Pantry as high quality protein donations are frequently in short supply and demand for assistance is rising rapidly. The protein is also popular among the clients as well. Two recent donations of 160 pounds of venison were distributed on the first day it was offered.

More information about the Hunters for the Hungry Program, including donation requirements and a list of local food kitchens that accept donations is available on DEM's website: www.dem.ri.gov.

Interviews:

- Lori Gibson, Supervising Wildlife Biologist, DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife, provided an overview of the Hunters for the Hungry program (Photo below, top left, being interviewed by Channel 10's Nicole Muri).
- Ron Mouchon, Owner/Operator, Breachway Bait and Tackle, talked about why and how his business is involved. (Photo below, top right).
- Debbie Nigrelli, Executive Director, St. Mary's/St. James Community Food Pantry, Meal Site and Emergency Services, discussed how the program benefits the food pantry. (Photo below, lower middle).

